



The PACT Act One-Year Anniversary and Your VA Benefits

August 10, 2023, marks the one-year anniversary of the Honoring Our PACT Act (PACT Act) being signed by President Biden. Congress passed this bill to help veterans exposed to toxic substances during military service access care.

The PACT Act expands U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care treatment and benefits to veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances. Specifically, it adds to the list of health conditions we presume are caused by exposure to toxic substances and expands benefits to veterans who experienced toxic exposure and have since been diagnosed with associated medical conditions. The bill provides for toxic exposure screening to every veteran enrolled in VA health care and additional resources to improve research, staff education, and treatment related to toxic exposures.

Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law, the VA has delivered more than \$1.4 billion in PACT Act benefits to veterans. More than 665,000 veterans, including 30,000 from the Fifth District, have applied for PACT Act-related benefits. Over 3.9 million veterans have received new toxic exposure screenings, and more than 287,000 veterans have enrolled in VA health care.

There is no deadline to apply for PACT Act benefits, however you MUST file your PACT Act claim by August 9, 2023, to receive benefits backdated to August 10, 2022.

You can file a claim now for PACT Act-related disability compensation at <https://www.va.gov/disability/file-disability-claim-form-21-526ez/introduction> or apply for VA health care now at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction> .

You can also call the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for 24/7 assistance at [800-698-2411](tel:800-698-2411) (TTY: 711).

PACT Act Basics:

- ❖ The PACT Act adds new presumptive conditions for radiation, Agent Orange, Gulf War toxins, and burn pit exposures.
- ❖ Eligibility to file claims related to the PACT Act expansion of benefits and relief associated with being granted those benefits went into effect immediately upon President Biden's signing it into law.
- ❖ Eligible veterans and survivors are encouraged to submit claims as soon as possible. Full eligibility information can be found at: <https://www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits/>
- ❖ The new classification of 23 conditions as presumptive will decrease the paperwork, timeline, processing associated with these claims. Veterans can file a new claim online at: <https://www.va.gov/disability/file-disability-claim-form-21-526ez/introduction>
- ❖ Veterans who were previously denied a claim that is now a presumptive condition can file a supplemental claim at: <https://www.va.gov/decision-reviews/supplemental-claim/>
- ❖ If a veteran previously submitted a claim for a condition now considered presumptive and the claim is still pending a decision, no action needs to be taken by the veteran, the review will proceed in accordance with the new eligibility.
- ❖ Claims processing related to PACT Act benefits began in January 2023, and new mechanisms and resources for processing also granted under the PACT Act has increased processing times.
- ❖ PACT Act-related claims that have been submitted by August 9, 2023, will be backdated to the date of the bill signing, meaning claims granted will be paid with an effective date of August 10, 2022.
- ❖ Information on VSOs and other resources available to guide veterans through the general claims process can be found at: <https://www.va.gov/disability/get-help-filing-claim/>

PACT Act Expansion of VA Healthcare:

- ❖ Expands the period for post-9/11 veterans to enroll in VA healthcare from 5 to 10 years for veterans discharged or released after October 1, 2013.
- ❖ Creates a one-year open enrollment period for veterans who already fall outside of the 10-year expanded window (defined as veterans discharged or released before October 1, 2013) from October 1, 2022, to October 1, 2023.